Worker Resistance to ICE

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On January 23, 2026, workers in Minneapolis embarked on what has been called the city's first general strike since the 1934 Teamsters strike, which broke the back of the anti-union Citizens Alliance and opened the field for workers in the Twin Cities [common name for Minneapolis and St. Paul] to organize. With 70,000 to 100,000 workers joining the mass march downtown, and many thousands more calling in but staying home in the brutal sub-zero cold snap, businesses across the core neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St Paul shuttered for the day, bringing commerce to a standstill.

The use of a general strike in an American city shows a renewed willingness of workers to take mass, collective action against a regime that is increasingly honest in its brutality, its disregard for the liberal norms of "constitutional" governance, and its attacks on the already battered remnants of the social safety net. Yet it was carried out by a mostly non-unionized workforce, with the unions themselves playing a contradictory role—both calling for a day without work or commerce but refusing to call it a strike, bound as they are by their contracts.

The Minneapolis General Strike of 2026 is a story about the interplay of the militant minority within the labor movement, the official institutions of the movement, and the broader community and working class mobilized in a window of social rupture. It is also the story of a city where a spirit of solidarity and direct action is being forged in successive waves of crisis and resistance, with the networks and strategies of each struggle building a base for the next. Minnesota combatted ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] through mutual aid, community self-defense and mass action as workers. Our capacity for each of these was built in preceding waves of struggle in the years before Metro Surge.

On the face of it, Minnesota is a strange place to target for immigration enforcement. Immigrants make up about 8.4% of the state's population. A little over half of the immigrants here are naturalized US citizens, and a little more than half of the non-citizen immigrants are here legally on various visas, temporary protected status or other legal status. Some of the largest immigrant communities are refugees and their descendants—particularly Somali, Oromo, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Hmong, Laotian and Karen. Many are here on work visas, such as the large but often "invisible" Indian community, or many Kenyan and Liberian workers in the care industry. Latin Americans are about a quarter of the immigrant population. Rough estimates are that around 20% of the immigrants in Minnesota, or around 2% of the population of the state, are undocumented.

As workers, Minnesota immigrants are spread throughout the economy. Residential construction sees a lot of Latino workers, both documented and undocumented. The Building Trades and organizations like the workers' center Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha have been fighting against trafficking and wage theft in our construction industry for years. Minnesota is home to many tech and engineering companies and corporate headquarters, so the H1-B visa program and other work permits attract oversees workers to places like 3M, Target, Honeywell, Medtronic, or to our universities or hospitals like the Mayo Clinic. Immigrants are heavily represented in Minnesota's manufacturing sector, warehouses and logistics, farm workers, meatpacking, child care, and elder care. This isn't very remarkable—it's similar in most states.

The targeting of Minneapolis, however, was remarkable. Throughout 2025, the Trump regime has been surging ICE agents in different 6 "sanctuary cities." There seem to be several motives at play. By targeting "sanctuary cities" the administration hopes to pressure cities into dropping their sanctuary status and cooperate with the deportation program, handing over undocumented immigrants to ICE in order to limit the presence of ICE snatch squads in the city's streets. The targeting of "blue" cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and Minneapolis may also be a way for the

Trump regime to play to its base, broadcasting the occupation and "cleaning up" of these cities which the Right has spent decades portraying as dangerous, decaying Democratic dens of degeneracy.

Another motive for the federal government seems to be to reset the baseline for federal involvement in US cities. After surging ICE agents into an area and escalating the brutality of their conduct, the regime can then draw the forces down leaving behind more agents than they had in the area prior to the surge. This is, as we'll discuss at the end of this piece, the shape that Metro Surge ultimately took.

Minnesota was also a personal target for Trump. The state rejected him in three successive elections, which Trump insists were stolen from him, and his administration demanded voter rolls and welfare rolls throughout the occupation. This is the state of Tim Walz, who ran against Trump as Harris's vice president, and who Trump tried hard to paint with the brush of fraud in the manufactured outrage over Somali daycares which the right used to manufacture consent for Metro Surge. It is the state of "Squad" member Representative Ilhan Omar, who Trump famously fixates on with racialized and anti-Muslim conspiracy theories. Most importantly, this is the community that began the 2020 George Floyd Uprising, which forced a racial reckoning throughout the United States as his first regime spun into electoral defeat. Minneapolis holds a special, despised place in the hearts of America's reactionaries that Paris or Petrograd (then Leningrad) once held in the hearts of Europe's conservatives. Metro Surge was not merely a police operation, it mirrored the White Terror of counter-revolutions past.

Community Self Defense

The people of the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota did not face Metro Surge unprepared. When ICE came to Minneapolis, they came to a community densely woven together through networks formed during multiple waves of struggle, willing to struggle both on the shop floor and in the streets in defense of their community.

Community self-defense has been an increasingly common phrase in American protest culture and the popular discourse since the occupation and siege of the Fourth Precinct in North Minneapolis in 2015, following the murder ofJamar Clark by the Minneapolis police. On the barricades around the Fourth Precinct, the term began being used in conversations between Black residents of the North Side, and anarchist members of the General Defense Committee of the Industrial Workers of the World, and especially its African People's Caucus, which was heavily involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. The GDC certainly did not invent community self-defense. People using the term were describing an organic practice we were seeing and participating in, and looking back to previous examples such as Occupy Homes, Anti-Racist action, copwatch programs, the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, and the Union Defense Guard of the 1934 Strike.

In the months and years that followed, however, anarchists in Minneapolis were among the most vocal proponents of the model. As GDC members described it, community self-defense applied aspects of the IWW's revolutionary unionism to issues outside of the shop floor. It confronted power through direct action rather than negotiation or symbolic protest. It was self-organized, without a central leader or chain of command, but with definite structure and process. It did not seek to have activists or paid professionals handle problems for the community, but

rather to organize with and as community members and build the capacity of others to stand up for themselves. It put forward radical visions, such as police and prison abolition, which were fringe positions within the movement at the time, but during times of social rupture such as 2020 briefly became widespread. With GDC working groups covering everything from copwatching to survivor justice to legal defense fundraising for people caught up in protesting ICE, this model would extend and influence far beyond the several hundred people of the General Defense Committee in the Twin Cities or the thousands of people involved in the Black Lives Matter movement in Minnesota. Even after the GDC dissolved and reformed under new projects, community self-defense as a model spread, became both a driver and a reflection of a militant shift in Twin Cities protest culture during the 2010s. This would explode into the Uprising in 2020.

The week-long Uprising in late May of 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, became a wellspring not only for protests across the US and the world, but also for new networks binding together Twin Cities residents for mutual protection and support. During the Uprising, neighborhood-level defense groups began to self-organize to look after safety and fire prevention in their area. These neighborhood organizations were cross-class and often policed protestors in order to defend property. However, more transformative projects would emerge out of them, especially as many business owners left the groups in the weeks after the Uprising as the Minneapolis police returned to their neighborhoods. Projects like Rock Steady Alliance, the Workers Defense Alliance, and Whittier Copwatch would all emerge during this period, bringing the lessons of the 2010s into the 2020s. More importantly, though, the safety loops themselves would often survive as simple neighborhood news and mutual aid loops, and thousands of Twin Cities residents left 2020 with new networks of companions with whom they had struggled and organized. They would bring with them not only these connections and experiences, but a new confidence and combativeness that would grow through the 2020s.

2020 was also a learning moment for all of us in mutual aid, both in the Twin Cities and throughout the country due to the Covid pandemic. Grocery deliveries, mask making and efforts to support homeless neighbors living in the growing camps which the city repeatedly evicted was another way that networks formed which would inform our resistance to ICE this last winter.

Labor After the Uprising

It was in the ashes of the Uprising that Twin Cities workers began getting more militant on the job site.

Service and food industry workers especially would launch a number of recognition campaigns in the year that followed, such as at Tattersall Distilling, Fair State Brewing, and the First Ave music venue. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers went on strike for the first time in 50 years in March 2022, putting racial justice concerns and retention of teachers of color front and center in their bargaining, alongside major wages for education support specialists and smaller class sizes and more mental health support. Many leaders of the strike, both newly elected and in the rank and file, were participants in the Uprising. This strike would in turn inspire new confidence in the ranks of the Minnesota Nurses Association and park workers represented by LIUNA. Both would go on strike in the years that followed.

By early 2024, a mood of militancy was spreading through enough of the rest of the local labor movement, that activists in several unions sought to support one another in a series of

contract negotiations taking place that year. This effort was initially referred to as a general strike, but in reality was more of a potential strike wave. The contracts were bargained one by one, not collectively, and most did not progress to a strike. This would come to be referred to as the 2024 Compression. It was instructive for local labor militants, as it showed both an appetite for inter-union solidarity and even for the general strike, but also the limitations imposed by labor officialdom, contractualism, and the separation of our unions.

The networking of the labor rank-and-file militants paid off, however. By late 2024, talks were taking place between several left-wing formations in the labor movement, and veterans of the Compression and other labor struggles since the Uprising, which would only accelerate in the fall as Trump claimed his second term.

The goal of these talks was to create a space within the labor movement, for a democratic and anti-authoritarian coalition to organize together within the unions and the broader working class. This effort is independent both of the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party, the local DNC-affiliated political machine with its attendant ecosystem of NGOs, and the institutional left in the Twin Cities dominated by vanguardist groups and their liberal fronts, which historically have not worked well in coalitions.

Over the course of 2024 these talks formed a new formation, the Workers Solidarity Circle, or WSC. The coalition, which brings together anarchists, democratic socialists, Marxists and militant rank and filers, has focused most of its energy on mass assemblies, opening the floor to all interested workers in a sort of general assembly of the Twin Cities metro's labor militants, of any union and any political tendency. Among the first of these was a December 15, 2024, assembly on how to resist the second Trump administration. This drew attendees from UNITE HERE, CWA, SEIU, MFT, MAPE, UDAM, NALC, SPFE, MNA, UFCW, the Carpenters, along with those from several unionizing campaigns and many non-unionized workers. Breaking out into small groups, the assembly discussed the attacks we expected the Trump administration to undertake: Mass deportation of immigrants, restrictions on abortion access and trans healthcare, attacks on unions, on the right to dissent, on the environment, and on education.

Based on conversations flowing from that assembly, another assembly was held in March 2025 on worker resistance to ICE. This assembly featured immigrant workers involved in past and future efforts to protect our communities from ICE and deportations. Response tactics and the building of rapid response were among the topics discussed at the assembly, as the labor rank and file drew closer to the immigrant defense efforts then still in gestation.

Last summer, the WSC held another mass meeting, at the Carpenters hall in St Paul, to raise the question of how a general strike could be organized and what it could achieve, in the struggle against the reactionary turn the Trump regime represents. The event brought together rank-and-file militants, former and current Wobblies, and the left wing of labor, with glimmers of support from the heights of the AFL-CIO's house of labor: the call by Shawn Fain to prepare for a 2028 general strike was a central feature of discussion, as well as the potential need for one sooner. Sarah Nelson of the AFA, who during Trump's first term had helped end a government shutdown by threatening strike action by flight attendants, was a guest speaker.

Efforts by the Workers Solidarity Circle, as well as the agitation of the broader labor left in the metro, had helped prime a militant minority of the workers for taking labor action against ICE terror. It would take Metro Surge, and the horror of daily disappearances and murder by federal agents in our streets to mobilize a greater majority of Twin Cities workers and neighbors.

Metro Surge Begins

Metro Surge was launched in early December, amid a right wing social media outrage campaign around alleged fraud in the childcare industry connected to the Somali community. Within the first week of the Surge, however, it became clear that Minnesota would not be a compliant target for ICE. Dedicated teams of community defenders operating rapid response loops quickly sprung up. Earlier in the year, Minneapolis had dealt with an ICE raid on the Cuatro Milpas restaurant on Lake Street, which had resembled other early to mid-2025 raids. A convoy of heavy vehicles with a large complement of armed agents drove to the restaurant and stayed for several hours as they searched the site. This allowed a large turnout of Minneapolitans to gather and confront the ICE agents. By December, ICE had changed tactics. During the Surge, ICE raid were conducted from vans, SUVs and other normal civilian vehicles. The teams were small, often two to four agents. Their doctrine was speed, surprise and violence of action: Showing up, grabbing a target or a target of opportunity such as a non-white day laborer or delivery driver, and disappearing within minutes.

To respond to this, rapid response loops could no longer be city-wide. While larger loops such as the South Side response loop remained active, most neighborhoods developed local loops for faster response times. Soon, people were patrolling their own neighborhood with their neighbors—in many cases, the same neighbors they had worked with during the Uprising.

Much of the history of Minneapolis' resistance to ICE will focus on the rapid response loops and volunteers who were directly responding to the federal agents. Renee Good and Alex Pretti were both killed while doing rapid response work, and many other responders were arrested, attacked, harrassed and threatened by ICE. But the resistance to ICE also rested on other pillars: on militant confrontations such as those on January 14th in North Minneapolis and on January 24th, and on the general strike of January 23rd.

We are able to tell the story of the general strike. There are many other stories of workers' resistance which we can only touch on briefly, or have only limited information on. There was a daring rescue of a patient injured by ICE from a Minneapolis hospital, in which nurses found a window of opportunity for the patient to escape. There were construction workers who helped their undocumented coworkers hide when ICE raided job sites. There were security guards, famously Red "Ten Toes Down" Wooten at the West Broadway McDonald's location, who refused to allow ICE into company property to harass immigrant workers. There was mutual aid for those in hiding, in the form of food deliveries or runs to the laundry with dirty clothes. One collective of carpenters even went around fixing doors that had been kicked in by ICE raids. Sadly, to get the full story of these acts of resistance would take a long process of gathering oral history, much of which cannot be done in the current atmosphere of repression.

The general strike, however, is no secret. How it came together and was experienced by militant rank and filers, however, is a story not yet told.

The General Strike

The dream of a general strike had long been harbored by the activists of the labor left, and more recently gained steam with a growing layer of politicized workers. Perennial online calls for a general strike over the years both showed the purchase the idea was gaining, but also the

huge barriers a largely disorganized class, with contract-bound bureaucratized unions, faced in actually carrying one out. This was the challenge: Workers who would support a general strike had no organizational center of gravity, no assurance that others would be joining the strike, as the unions represent an ever-shrinking part of the American workforce and were contractually bound not to strike.

The crisis of Metro Surge, however, began to change this impasse, locally. Unions in the Twin Cities have a strong contingent of militants and radicals among us, and even the officialdom felt the need to mobilize and resist the federal terror being inflicted on our community. In the immediate aftermath of the murder of Renee Good (killed by a 10-year Border Patrol veteran unleashing their customary brutality, but this time on the streets of Minneapolis), it was the AFL-CIO that led a huge mass protest at the Whipple federal building where ICE was headquartered. As an ethos of direct action and self-organization swept through the city with people doing mutual aid and defending our community from ICE, the same mood spread to the workplaces. The idea of a general strike was beginning to look less like a pipe dream.

A group ofworker organizers in the Workers Solidarity Circle took the initiative, drafting a call for a mass meeting to plan a general strike. They reached out to the officials of the labor movement, particularly SEIU, which locally had already lost several members to ICE abduction, to endorse this meeting. Rather than endorse the meeting, SEIU officials reached out to other officers in local unions and drafted a call for a day of action: January 23rd, no work, no school, no shopping.

As soon as the call for the Day of Action was issued, rank-andfile militants in the union ran with it, as did the organized left and the rapid response networks. Flyers and posters of varying designs, announcing a general strike on January 23rd began appearing all over town. Even though union officials carefully avoided the word "Strike," within days nobody was referring to it as a "day of action." It was the general strike—and it was coming fast, gaining steam.

Non-unionized workers, especially immigrants, were among the most enthusiastic self-organizers in the week leading up to January 23rd. Salts in the SEIU campaign in the nursing home report multiple marches on the boss and other action by immigrant women care workers, telling the management that they would not be coming in that day, no matter what punishments and threats management brought out. The scene repeated in small and large businesses across the Cities. Many of these businesses would go on to close their doors on January 23rd, usually omitting—to save face—that the decision had been their workers', not their owner's. The call to action had given non-unionized workers a center of gravity to mobilize around. Civic organizations and churches in immigrant communities played an important role, as well, as they had during the Day Without an Immigrant protests in 2006 and 2025.

Bound by their contracts, the unions themselves had to walk a delicate path, neither engaging in an illegal strike nor failing to act when the community, the militants in their ranks, and the gravity of the moment demanded action. Several of the unions that had called for the day of action released statements clarifying that they were not going on strike, but reminding members that they could use PTO or sick time, or request the day off These statements amounted to a sort of wink and nod for those members who were inclined to take part in the strike. Yet, they also meant that the strike would be treated as a protest action. Workers who reported in for work would not face a penalty.

Several unions asked employers to voluntarily close. Where that failed, they asked that workers be allowed to take time off without penalty. Where that was declined, they asked that workers

be allowed to use PTO. They pushed back against caps set on how many people could use PTO and tried to get assurances against retaliation for calling in sick. Without breaking their contracts and fully going on strike, the officials searched for ways to protect members who took the initiative to withhold our own labor.

On the morning of January 23rd, the highways were unusually clear. Rush hour did not come. Few businesses were open in core Twin Cities neighborhoods. Around a thousand small businesses across the metro closed their doors for the day. Some closed because the owner felt solidarity with the resistance to ICE. Many closed because of worker walkouts or fear of public backlash for remaining open. Both consumer pressure and worker pressure enforced the closures for the day. The political agent and collective identity here was not only the worker, but the neighbor, and breaking the strike/boycott was considered a betrayal of the community.

Among unionized workers, the most complete closures were in service and retail. The UFCW's membership shut down every co-op grocery they represented in the city, as well as Half Price Books and Peace Coffee. Every museum in the Cities, mostly represented by OPEIU and AFSCME, closed. The Guthrie Theater shut down as IATSE members withheld their labor. The Starbucks Workers Union took six shops out of action for the day with a ULP strike. Union participation was particularly high in workplaces with recent struggles.

The strike began to falter outside of the core metro and in more blue collar rather than service industries. Most big businesses in the suburbs, which host a thriving light manufacturing sector, kept operating, including ones with big immigrant workforces. We didn't see shutdowns in the UNFI warehouse in Hopkins, or the Amazon hubs, or other major suburban enterprises.

Even with these shortcomings, however, the rally in downtown Minneapolis was 70,000 to 100,000 people. We know participation in the strike was greater. Many stayed home due to the brutal weather (temperatures as low as -20F), or participated in rapid response loops/ guard duties or other protests.

The January 23rd general strike was a powerful show of force. However, as a one day strike, it remained mostly a demonstration of our power, rather than a full exercise of it. It was, however, a power that workers and the ruling class alike had almost forgotten we had.

After the strike

The day after the strike, federal agents killed Alex Pretti as he attempted to put himself between an agent and a woman—an observer to an attempted abduction—they were attacking. The response from the community was overwhelming, as dozens of responders became hundreds, and then thousands. Hours later, the remaining agents and their local collaborators in the Minneapolis police and Hennepin sheriffs had spent what chemical irritants they brought with them, and began to beat a retreat. Whittier, the neighborhood where they shot Pretti, was laced across with barricades. As community defenders secured the boundaries of a temporary free zone, and mourners gathered at the place where Alex had died, voices on the barricades began to call for the general strike to extend into Monday.

When Monday came, though, the strike did not resume. A second day of action was soon called, with voices from the African student organizations at the University of Minnesota, and the Party for Socialism and Liberation, foremost among those calling for it. The call failed to gain the confidence of most of the unions or the civic organizations representing the immigrant

communities, however. January 30th saw a spirited march through downtown Minneapolis, but fell short of the mass work stoppages a week earlier.

The Trump administration had already begun to adjust its strategy, in the week after the general strike on the 23rd and the barricades rising in Whittier the next day. Greg Bovino was removed from command on January 26th, to be replaced with Tom Homan. Within weeks, Homan would announce the end of Metro Surge, and drawdowns of the presence of federal agents. Since Homan has taken over, the ICE presence in Minnesota has drawn down to around 400 agents—higher than before Metro Surge but much lower than the peak during the surge. They increasingly target suburban and rural areas where they expect less organized resistance.

Yet organized resistance continues—in the "commuter" rapid response loops, in mutual aid efforts, and in labor. The official end of Metro Surge demobilized many volunteers, but the forces of resistance are now stronger than before the Surge.

The unions have announced May 1 as the next day of action here in Minneapolis. By the time this piece is published, readers will be able to look at the day in hindsight. Much of the preparations for May 1 have been carried out through a series of mass workers assemblies, called by the Workers Solidarity Circle. The first of these attracted 400 workers from 30 unions, endorsing the Day ofAction as well as a series of actions leading up to it, mostly targeting those corporations, like Target, which collaborated with ICE during Metro Surge. Minnesota's resistance to ICE did not rest on any one strategy, but on a combination of community self-defense, mutual aid and workers' actions. Although faced with the challenge of coordinating action in a mostly non-unionized workforce and with contract-bound unions, the workers of the Twin Cities managed to carry out a general strike, the first in the Cities since 1934, if only for one day. Metro Surge has left our city battered and with thousands of neighbors disappeared. But it has also led tens of thousands of us to meet our neighbors, and to organize together with neighbors and coworkers. We know, now, that we can strike. That is a confidence and an experience we carry forward, into the next struggle to come.

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